

double minded. Grieve, mourn and wail.” The answer is not to try harder and do more. The answer is simply to collapse in the arms of the one who is pursuing you. It is to embrace your jealous husband and to allow him to lavish his love upon you.

Do you see how James is giving us a gospel answer – a good news answer - to our life’s real problems? He’s not just giving us advice, or tips or corrections. What is he requiring of you? Simply to submit and to draw near to God. To prepare ourselves to be in God’s presence and to open our hearts so that God can heal our deepest emotions. As your everlasting spouse, God is committed to your perfection. He’s not okay with your fighting, quarreling and passions. It’s a sign of your heart’s dysfunction. He will not allow it. He will not turn a blind eye. His jealous love is a love that drives him to pursue you over and over, season by season, year by year.

C.S. Lewis once put it this way, “When Christianity says that God loves man it means that God LOVES man: not that He has some 'disinterested' concern for our welfare, but that in awful and surprising truth, we are the objects of His love. You asked for a loving God: you have one...Not a senile benevolence that drowsily wishes you to be happy in your own way, not the cold philanthropy of a conscientious magistrate, nor the care of a host who feels responsible for the comfort of his guests, but the consuming fire Himself, the Love that made the worlds...

...How this should be, I do not know: it passes reason to explain why any creatures, not to say creatures such as we should have a value so prodigious in their Creator's eyes. It is certainly a burden of glory, not only beyond our deserts but also, except in rare moments of grace, beyond our desiring; we are inclined, like the maidens in the old play, to deprecate the love of Zeus.”

What C.S. Lewis is saying is that we cannot fully comprehend this love that we have from God. In fact, we don’t even fully

understand its value. We dismiss it off handedly, not realizing that in this love of God is the very thing we’re all searching for. It’s right there before us, just waiting to be received and reciprocated.

So this morning James pulls back the curtain on what it means to fall in love with our jealous God. His fiery love, so transformative in its power, that its strength can realign our disordered hearts.

Dr. James begins our passage with a question. “What causes fights and quarrels among you?” His answer? “Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? He’s right. Our desires send us off in all directions searching for what we need, for what we want, for what we were made for. When in reality, the object of our affections isn’t to be found, for He has already found us. And Jesus issues a simple invitation. “Come to me all who are weary and carrying heavy loads.” Jesus calls you. Jesus draws you. Rest in Him.

Thanks be to God, Amen.

“Faith Works: Quarrels, Fights and Passions”

July 21st, 2024 — Selby United Church – Scripture James 4:1-8

By Rev. Mike Putnam

When you make an appointment to see your doctor you go in hope, don’t you? You hope there is nothing really wrong. You hope it’s not that serious. You hope it’ll be a quick in-and-out kind of thing – but it’s worth just making sure...

“A short round of antibiotics should clear this right up,” you hope your doctor will say. “It’s probably nothing, we’ll just keep an eye on it for a few months, but your symptoms will probably just go away on their own,” seems like a best-case scenario.

But sometimes that’s not the case. Sometimes the doctor looks up from the test results and says “It’s going to be a long road. You’re dealing with something that could well be fatal.

And when that happens you lean in. “Whatever it takes,” we say. “Just give me the latest and greatest treatment available.” “Is there a new medicine or a trial going on I could be part of?”

This morning Dr. James has made note of our symptoms. “You are having quarrels and fights; you’re wrestling with the passions of your heart.” We want him to tell us this is no big deal. We want him to say there’s an easy fix – and it’s mostly the other people who need work. But this morning James makes a few hastily scribbled notes on his note pad, and he says, “I’m going to send you for more tests.”

That’s never a good sign, but we’re still hoping for the best. It’s just a

precaution. He’s just doing his due diligence. Right?

But the pathology report comes back with the razor-sharp features of our malady. The problem actually isn’t our quarrels, the problem isn’t our fights and the problem isn’t our passions. The problem goes much deeper.

Dr. James is acting as our cardiologist this morning. He says, “You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive because you ask with wrong motives.”

And?... What does all this mean, Dr. James? Is it serious? Can it be treated?

In a nutshell, the problem is a problem of the heart. Once again, our heart’s desires and our attempts at getting what we want have sent us into the ditch of life. The curse of sin at work in all of our hearts has done its work.

James says the problem is that we either don’t ask God or we ask God wrong heartedly for the things we need. We go it alone or we try to manipulate God into giving us the wrong things. And if this is our condition, no wonder there are quarrels, fights and passions flaring up. No wonder our situation seems so disordered.

But Dr. James isn’t done. There’s more. He’s now ready to put a name on it. He’s now ready, having collected our symptoms, received the pathology reports

and studied the data, to give a diagnosis.

James says, "It's adultery...". He says, "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God."

You see, the problem that we all face is a kind of adultery. It's putting our relationship with worldly things ahead of our relationship with God. It's valuing, cherishing, desiring the things of time and space more than desiring our eternal hope and salvation given to the bride of Christ.

Scripture regularly refers to our relationship between us and God as a kind of marriage. It's a metaphorical way of understanding this totally unique relationship given to us by Jesus' sacrificial grace – but it is one of the most powerful relationships possible, requiring our full allegiance, commitment and desire.

Isaiah speaks of it this way: "As a young man marries a young woman, so will your Builder marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you."

In the New Testament, the apostle John writes in Revelation, "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready" (Rev. 19:6-7). Who is the bride? It's us. It's the church.

And what these two little examples are telling us is that God desires to enter into a covenant relationship with his people that is intended to be

permanent, to be life giving, to meet our deepest needs and satisfy our most passionate desires.

But it's interesting that James makes a direct correlation between our failure in this unique marriage between us and God and our behaviour with one another.

I sometimes listen to country music on the radio, and I'm always amazed at how much of country music is about how hard marriage is. Song after song is about cheating partners, partners not being good spouses, and about walking out or packing up. And I think this genre music is popular because it speaks to the challenge of two people trying to make it work in a day-in-age when marriage is so very difficult.

The expectations people put upon their marriages is generally unreasonable. Because there's no one person who can truly complete you. There's no one person who can meet all of your needs. There is no one person who can satisfy your deepest desires all of the time in just the right way. But maybe it's not supposed to.

God tells us that our human relationships are but a shadow of what our relationship with him is supposed to be. Try to make marriage work on its own – try to make one person complete you – and you are destined for disappointment. And, you will crush them under the weight of your endless expectation and need.

But let God be your first marriage – let God complete you and meet your deepest needs – let God be your hearts first love – and it takes the

pressure off of our human relationships to be everything for us.

It might make the hard days a little less discouraging. It might make the disappointments less "life or death," because you aren't resting your whole identity on that one relationship.

So, Dr. James has heard our symptoms (fights, quarrels, and passions) and he's made his diagnosis. We've got a case of adultery – loving other things more than we love God. We love worldly things too much and God too little. Because when we love God first, as we were always intended to, we put all our other good things in their rightful place. We can hold on to them a little less tightly. We can enjoy them on their terms not ours.

But how do you do that? What's the treatment Dr. James prescribes?

He says, "Do you suppose it is to no purpose that the scripture says, "He yearns jealousy over the spirit that he has made to dwell with us?" The answer is jealousy. The answer to our unfaithful hearts is God's jealousy.

See, God isn't an absent or uncaring husband. He's not a wife who packs up her things and leaves. He's not anything like all of those bad examples of spouses we hear about or maybe even experience in our own lives. God is a jealous spouse – and I hope you can hear that as good news!

Because he can't leave us alone. He can't just put us out of his mind. God is obsessed with you. And because his love burns so hot for you, James tells us that he is as good a lover and provider and caregiver as we could ever desire.

What a thing to say about God!

What good news for those who struggle to find love and contentment in their deepest human relationships.

And if we flee to Jesus in our endless need, we will find a source of love and intimacy that more than makes up for the love and intimacy deficits in our lives.

James says, "But he gives us more grace." What does this mean? It means he forgives us over and over and over again. He knows we aren't a perfect partner for him, but his grace is greater than our sin.

Then James says, "That is why the scripture says: "God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble." In other words, he doesn't just let us go on being self-sufficient people – he opposes those who are proud. But don't hear that as bad news. Hear that as a faithful and gentle husband who doesn't just let us go on living full autonomous lives without relying on him. No, he says, "Come to me...trust in me...rely on me...I'll be more than enough for you – don't try to do this alone."

And then he shows favour to the humble. What do the humble need? Building up. Encouragement. They need to know that they are truly important that they matter. God says you are my treasure.

So, what's the treatment regime look like for our fatally unfaithful hearts? James writes, "Submit yourselves, then to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you